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ABSTRACT

Factors contributing to Native students' college success were examined in a study of 50 Native freshmen and 42 non-Native freshmen at the University of Alaska in the 1973-74 academic year. The study compared students in relation to three common explanations of college success: level of academic preparation, goal orientation, ease in the campus social world. Data were obtained from interviews with students, the Student Orientation Services (SOS) counselor, an SOS professor familiar with each student's daily work, and the dormitory advisor, plus university records showing ACT scores, urban/rural background, grade-point averages, and credits completed. Results showed that college success among Native freshmen was most strongly and consistently related to level of academic skills acquired in high school. Goal orientation, similar for Natives and non-Natives, did not appear to be important to success. Natives were significantly more likely to see the university as an unfriendly place with active prejudice, but no significant relationship appeared between these attitudes and college performance. Study results raised serious questions about the long-term consequences of decreased attention high schools are giving to college preparation of Native students. It was maintained that high schools must increase quality of academic preparation, especially for rural students interested in college. (RS)

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Alaska Native Students and College Success

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INTRODUCTION

The shift of economic and political power to Native corporations, rural school boards, and related organizations has intensified the need for Natives with a college education. During the late 1960's and early 1970's, various organizations made substantial efforts to increase the number of Native college graduates. As a result, rates of Native college enrollment and success considerably increased. Two different kinds of programs were responsible for this success, and their policy efforts took two directions:

1. High school programs, such as Upward Bound, sought to increase Native students' interest in college and their preparation for college.
2. Campus-based programs, such as Student Orientation Services (SOS) at the University of Alaska, provided counseling services and coursework oriented toward rural students' backgrounds and needs.[1]

Over the past few years, however, the effort to prepare Native students for college during high school has substantially declined. Upward Bound, for example, reached only eleven high schools in 1976-77 and expects to serve only nine high schools in 1977-78. Moreover, Upward Bound no longer concentrates specifically on college, but has broadened its focus to a more general orientation toward vocational training and employment. The emerging small high schools in village Alaska, despite their other benefits, have tended to remove attention from college preparation, since few students in any single school are interested in college. Moreover, their small enrollment makes it more difficult to offer specialized academic subjects.

At the college level itself, however, effort to increase the number of college graduates has remained strong or has taken new directions. The Student Orientation Services Program at the University of Alaska's Fairbanks campus[2] offers social and cultural activities, tutoring, counseling, and coursework. In addition, the university is now directing policy efforts toward delivering higher education directly to rural areas through community colleges, learning centers, and private institutions associated with Native organizations.

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[1]Karen Kohout and Judith Kleinfeld, *Alaska Natives in Higher Education* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska, Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research Report No. 40, 1974), 49 pp.

[2]For convenience, we will refer to this campus simply as the "University of Alaska" for the remainder of this study.

The purpose of this study was to examine factors contributing to Native students' college success in this changing context. In interpreting its results, one must keep in mind the limitations of a small, intensive study, conducted at one point in time (study details given in Appendix). This study primarily concerns a single group of fifty Native freshmen and forty-two non-Native freshmen who entered the University of Alaska in the 1974 academic year. Despite the small numbers studied, the college careers of these students raises an important policy issue involving high school preparation:

> *College success among the Native freshmen was strongly related to the students' prior academic preparation- the level of skills he had or had not acquired in high school. A Native freshman who entered with low academic skills had less than a one-in-three chance of succeeding during his first college semester. A Native freshman who entered with moderate academic skills had better than a four-in-five chance of succeeding during his first semester. A Native student's level of academic skill was more strongly related to his college success than whether he came from a remote village or a western background, whether or not he found the campus friendly, or whether or not he had clear goals.*

Thus, the results of this study raise serious questions about the long-term consequences of the decreasing attention high schools are now giving to college preparation of Native students. If we are to increase the chances of college success for Native students, high schools must give serious attention to increasing the quality of academic preparation, especially for those rural students interested in college.

RESEARCH APPROACH

Very little research has been done on factors related to Native students' college success. In a study of Native freshmen who entered the University of Alaska between 1968 and 1972, Kohout and Kleinfeld found higher rates of success among: (1) students with an urban background, (2) those who had attended private boarding schools, and (3) those with higher academic skills.[3] In a study of all Native students at the University of Alaska in the 1975 school year, Goodwin and Orvik found higher rates of success among: (1) those with an urban background, (2) those who had not been displaced from a rural setting to attend high school, and (3) those having a

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[3]Kohout and Kleinfeld, *Alaska Natives in Higher Education*, Tables 12 and 13.

racial background of one-half or less Native.[4]

These studies, however, provided little direction for policy efforts concerned with increasing Native students' college success.[5] To develop more useful hypotheses, we interviewed particular members of the college staff to find out what they felt, based on their teaching experiences, were the most important factors contributing to Native college success.

Common Explanations of Native College Success

These initial discussions suggested three areas that should be explored:

1. **Level of Academic Preparation.** Some college staff stressed the need for more adequate academic preparation. Many students arrived without the academic skills needed to do well, and the academic services available through the SOS program (college courses designed to teach skills needed for regular coursework and tutors) were still not enough.

2. **Goal Orientation.** Some college staff brought up the idea that many Native students arrived without clear goals to which a college degree was relevant. Students either didn't know why they had come to college or else they had come for noncareer or noneducational reasons. Clear goals were important in stimulating the motivation necessary to do well in college.

3. **Ease in the Campus Social World.** According to some college staff, village students often did badly in college because they felt uncomfortable and ill at ease on campus. Many students saw the dormitories, college staff, and general social climate as impersonal, unfriendly, and prejudiced, especially in comparison to the close, personal relationships of a small village.

Methods

To test the validity of these three explanations, we examined

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[4]Paul Goodwin and James Orvik, "Cross-Cultural Aspects of Academic Performance—Implications for the Sciences," in Ray Barnhardt, Ed. *Cross-Cultural Issues in Alaskan Education* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska, Center for Northern Educational Research, 1977), pp. 120-132.

[5]The only other study known to the author is A. Foster, "Predispositions to Success by Alaska Native Students: An Interim Study," *Final Report, Rehabilitation Project RC-20-G* (Anchorage: Alaska Native Medical Center, June 1969). However, both the kind of Native student entering college and the social and academic support available in the college environment have changed so substantially since that time that the results were of little use in this study.

the college careers of the fifty Native freshmen who entered the University of Alaska in the 1974 academic year and the careers of a comparison group of forty-two non-Native freshmen (a 25-percent random sample of the non-Native freshmen class). Students were given a semi-structured interview concerning their views in three areas: (1) the friendliness and prejudices of the campus, (2) the quality and demands of academic coursework, and (3) their career goals and reasons for coming to college. We also interviewed each student's SOS counselor, dormitory advisor, and a major SOS professor on the student's social and academic adjustment and goals. In addition, we obtained background information, such as: high school attended, residence, degree Native, and scores on the American College Test (ACT) from college records. [6]

RESULTS

Level of Academic Preparation

For Native freshmen, a low level of academic preparation as measured by academic entrance tests[7] showed a very strong relationship to academic failure (Table 1).

A Native student who entered with an ACT score below 10 had less than a 33-percent chance of doing well in college. A Native student who entered with an ACT score between 16 and 20 had better than an 80 percent chance of succeeding. The relationship between ACT scores and college performance was about as strong for Native students (c = .40) as it was for non-Native students (c = .44).[8]

A problem in using test scores to measure level of academic skills is that these scores may also reflect the influence of motivation. Students who do not have much motivation to do well in college

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[6]A detailed description of the sample, methods, and limitations of the study may be found in the Appendix.

[7]The problems in using standardized tests, such as the American College Test, to assess the academic levels of culturally different students are well known. These tests are inadequate as a measure of ability. They may, however, be useful as a measure of academic preparation for college. The kinds of skills required to get a high score on the test are similar to the skills required to get high grades in a conventional college program.

[8]c=Pearson's coefficient of contingency, which measures the degree of association between two variables, in this case, ACT scores and college performance.

Table 1

Relationship of Academic Preparation to College Success*

American College Test Scores	Native Freshmen				Non-Native Freshmen			
	Academic Success		Academic Failure		Academic Success		Academic Failure	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
High (21+)					17	57	3	23
Medium High (16-20)	10	37	3	13	9	30	4	31
Medium Low (11-15)	12	44	8	35	3	10	6	46
Low (0-10)	5	19	12	52	1	3		
Total	27	100	23	100	30	100	13	100
	$x^2 = 9.33$ df = 2 $p < .01$				$x^2 = 9.86$ df = 3 $p < .01$			

*Success is defined as maintaining a 2.0 grade point average while completing 7.5 or more credits.

may also have little motivation to do well on an entrance test. To guard against this problem, we asked an SOS professor of each Native student in the sample whether the student's academic preparation was (1) high, (2) sufficient for college, or (3) insufficient for college. The professor's evaluation was based on day-to-day contact with students in coursework. Professor's evaluations of the students' academic preparation were very strongly related to students' college success, indeed a little more strongly than ACT scores (c=.50)[9] .

To obtain perspective on the importance of academic preparation, it is useful to compare its significance to the significance of having a western background.[10] Students were considered to have a western background if they grew up in a city or white-majority town, were less than one-half Native, or had been adopted by white parents or had similar background experiences. As other research has shown, Native students with such a western background do better in college (Table 2). However, the relationship of western background to college success is not as great as that of academic preparation to college success. Indeed, in this small sample, the relationship of western background to college success does not reach statistical significance.[11]

Time and time again, the histories of Native college freshmen revealed painful accounts of students who had worked hard but did not have the skills necessary to make their efforts pay off. The college careers of these conscientious students often started with enormous quantities of energy spent in studying and attending class and concluded with sporadic effort and disillusionment. As a college counselor described one such student who completed the semester with a zero grade point average:

> He was very, very concerned and ambitious, especially in the early days. His attendance was really high. He'd get his assignments in. He was very concerned about making sure that he did everything right. But all of his attempts were futile, because he just really wasn't prepared for the materials the professors were handling in class. He just couldn't get it all

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[9] $x^2 = 14.89$, df = 2, $p < .01$, n = 45 students.

[10] More westernized students tend to have higher academic skills, but looking at the effects of each factor alone provides some indication of its relative importance.

[11] The relationship would reach statistical significance if the sample were larger. Previously performed research that has shown the influence of urban background or degree of Native background on college success has been based on larger samples.

Table 2

Relationship of Village vs. Western Background to College Success*

	Native Freshmen with Village Backgrounds		Native Freshmen with Western Backgrounds		Non-Native Freshmen	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Academic Success	15	47	13	72	28	67
Academic Failure	17	53	5	28	14	33
Total	32	100	18	100	42	100

$x^2 = 4.20$
df = 2
n.s.

*Success is defined as maintaining a 2.0 grade point average while completing 7.5 or more credits.

done. Then, after a while, he seemed to lose incentive to get there and give what was expected of him.

He simply came up against a set of demands which he was incapable of dealing with. I know it was a blow to his self-concept, but he never considered withdrawing completely. He kept shaving back his credit load until he finished up with only 4 credits.

Not all students with low levels of academic preparation exerted such high effort. Some in this group attended class occasionally and involved themselves primarily in the social life of downtown Fairbanks. A counselor described one such freshman, for example, who acted as if his dormitory room were an urban apartment which made it convenient for him to pursue a life-style that didn't happen to include going to class. It is worth asking, however, if, in such cases as this, low academic skill and not just motivation is also a large part of the problem. Students who see little chance of doing well may protect their self-esteem by putting little effort into college.

Goal Orientation

Despite common beliefs, having a clear, specific career goal in itself does not appear to be important to Native students' success in college (Table 3). However, the career goals of the Native

Table 3

Relationship of Career Goals to College Success*

	Native Freshmen				Non-Native Freshmen			
	Academic Success		Academic Success		Academic Success		Academic Success	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Specific Goal	12	55	4	31	12	50	2	34
General Goal	9	41	7	54	9	38	2	33
No Goal	1	4	2	15	3	12	2	33
Total	22	100	13	100	24	100	6	100
		$x^2 = 2.43$ df = 2 n.s.				$x^2 = 1.56$ df = 2 n.s.		

*Success is defined as maintaining a 2.0 grade point average while completi 7.5 or more credits.

freshmen in our sample were just as clear (or unclear) as those of the non-Native (Table 4). Of the Native group, 46 percent had a specific goal (for example, becoming a bilingual teacher) compared to 47 percent of the non-Natives (Table 4).

Table 4

Clarity of Career Goals

	Native Freshmen		Non-Native Freshmen	
	N	%	N	%
Specific Goal	16	46	14	47
General Goal	16	46	11	37
No Goal	3	8	5	16
Total	35	100	30	100
			$x^2 = 1.18$	
			df = 2	
			n.s.	

What may be important to success is a sense of direction much broader and more fundamental than a simple career goal. In our interviews, we asked students why they had come to college. Their responses gave some indication of this sense of direction or lack of it.[12] It is of interest that the Native freshmen (significantly more often than the non-Natives) said that they had come to college to "see what it was like" or because they had "nothing else to do" (Table 5). For Native students, this kind of motivation was significantly related to college failure (Table 6).

Coming to college to "see what it is like" may not be conducive to doing well in college, but should it be viewed in negative terms? Perhaps so, if this attitude indicates a general, persistent difficulty in forming an identity and deciding upon an adult direction. However, this attitude and the resulting time spent in college may also be part of a productive attempt to explore the world and decide upon a satisfying adult role. What happens to these students afterwards and whether the college experience could be made more valuable for them are important questions that deserve further attention.

[12]However, considerable caution must be used in interpreting these results, because students' responses were often vague and quite difficult to code. Further, the sample is very small.

Table 5

Reason for Going to College

	Native Freshmen		Non-Native Freshmen	
	N	%	N	%
See what it is like/ nothing else to do	9	33	1	4
Expectation of parents or general society	9	33	8	67
Vocation/special interest	2	8	6	22
Other: Friends going/high school press/get away from home	7	26	2	7
Total	27	100	27	100

$x^2 = 14.18$
$df = 3$
$p < .01$

Ease in the Campus Social World

Evidence does not conclusively show that feeling ill at ease on campus causes Native students to do poorly in college. The Native freshmen we interviewed were significantly more likely than the non-Natives to see the university as an unfriendly place where there was active anti-Native prejudice. But no statistically significant relationship appeared between such attitudes and college performance. On the other hand, both Native and non-Native freshmen who lived in more personal, socially cohesive dormitories did significantly better in college than those who lived in the large, anonymous units. This result supports the view that improving the campus social atmosphere will increase college success.

Views on the Campus Social Atmosphere. One of the interview questions asked whether students thought the university had a friendly, personal atmosphere or whether students were "treated like numbers." Forty-eight percent of the Native freshmen asserted that the university was highly friendly, with another 36 percent stating that it was moderately friendly (Table 7). In contrast, 83 percent of the non-Native freshmen described the campus as highly friendly. In addition, the Native freshmen were significantly less likely than the non-Natives to form friendships with other students they met on

Table 6

Reason for Going to College vs. College Success*

	Native Freshmen				Non-Native Freshmen			
	Academic Success		Academic Failure		Academic Success		Academic Failure	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
See what it is like/nothing else to do	4	21	5	63	1	5	0	0
Expectations of parents or general society	6	32	3	37	13	62	5	83
Vocation/special interest	2	10	0	0	5	23	1	17
Other: Friends going/high school pressure/get away from home	7	37	0	0	2	10	0	0
Total	19	100	8	100	21	100	6	100

$x^2 = 6.75$
df = 3
p .05

$x^2 = 1.29$
df = 3
n.s.

*Success is defined as maintaining a 2.0 grade point average while completing 7.5 or more credits.

Table 7

Views on Friendliness of the University of Alaska's Fairbanks Campus

Friendliness	Native Freshmen N	Native Freshmen %	Non-Native Freshmen N	Non-Native Freshmen %
High	15	48	24	83
Moderate	11	36	4	14
Low	5	16	1	3
Total	31	100	29	100

$x^2 = 7.95$
$df = 2$
$p < .05$

campus but tended to remain with friends they had known from home or high school (Table 8).

Close to half the Native freshmen (45 percent), compared to only 23 percent of the non-Natives, felt that there was prejudice against Natives on campus (Table 9). In evaluating prejudice on campus, the Native and non-Native students often made the same observations: both talked about Natives and non-Natives eating in different parts of the Commons dining room, having different friends, and having little to do with each other.

There was a difference, however, in their interpretation of these observations. A third of the non-Native students interpreted the situation not as prejudice, but as natural isolation between cultural groups with different backgrounds and interests. The non-Native students felt that the Natives had extraordinarily low visibility, although they comprised almost a quarter of the freshman class. Indeed, when we asked the non-Native students whether or not they thought there was prejudice on campus, many of them talked initially about prejudice against blacks. Yet, there were very few blacks at the university; none at all appeared in our freshman sample. Part of the reason non-Natives did not perceive prejudice seemed to be deliberate avoidance. As one white freshman explained, he once heard two Indians in the hall talking about how other people looked down on them, but it was a "heavy" discussion, so he walked away.

Native students, in discussing the active prejudice involved in

Table 8

Importance of Friendships Formed at College and Through Home or High School

Friendships Formed at College	Native Freshmen N	%	Non-Native Freshmen N	%
Important	12	38	23	77
Weak	8	25	6	20
Absent	12	37	1	3
Total	32	100	30	100

$x^2 = 13.0$
df = 2
$p < .01$

Friendships Formed through Home Town or High School	Native Freshmen N	%	Non-Native Freshmen N	%
Important	21	66	6	20
Weak	4	12	3	10
Absent	7	22	21	70
Total	32	100	30	100

$x^2 = 15.43$
df = 2
$p < .01$

campus events usually talked about the general atmosphere of prejudice. These "campus events" were frequently classroom situations, where the Natives felt that non-Native students had made derogatory remarks about Natives. No Native freshman mentioned physical abuse by a non-Native.

While the Native freshmen were more ill at ease on campus, their feelings appeared to have no significant relationship to college success. Those Native students who saw the university as unfriendly and prejudiced did just as well in college as those who saw it as friendly and unprejudiced (Tables 10 and 11).[13]

[13]This surprising result is perhaps due to the inadequacy of our interview measure. These questions, for example, may have been measuring perceptions on too much of an intellectual level rather than on the level of personal feeling. It may also be that some students who felt uncomfortable did not wish to seem discourteous by saying so.

Table 9

Views on Prejudice Against Natives at the University of Alaska's Fairbanks Campus

	Native Freshmen		Non-Native Freshmen	
	N	%	N	%
Perceived Direct Prejudice Against Natives	14	45	6	23
Perceived Natural Isolation of Different Cultural Groups	2	7	9	33
Perceived No Prejudice	15	48	12	44
Total	31	100	27	100

$x^2 = 7.75$
df = 2
$p < .05$

Effects of Living in More Personal, Socially Supportive Dormitories. Another way to examine the relationship between a personal social atmosphere and college success is to compare the college performance of students placed in dormitories with personal versus impersonal atmospheres. The social atmosphere of individual dormitories on the Fairbanks campus differ substantially from one another. The larger dorms on the upper campus tend to have a more impersonal social atmosphere. In addition to having larger numbers of students, they have spatial arrangements that are less conducive to developing a more congenial atmosphere. The individual rooms on the upper campus dormitories line one side of the corridor and face a blank wall that contains the common rooms. The lower campus dormitories, on the other hand, have fewer students, and the rooms tend to face one another. However, there are other things that affect the social atmosphere besides student numbers and room arrangement. For example, there is the attitude of the resident advisor and the upperclassmen in residence. Thus, the social atmosphere of a particular dormitory can vary considerably from year to year.

The least cohesive dormitories in the 1974 academic year were two of the upper campus residence halls, Bartlett (225 students) and

Table 10

Views on Campus Friendliness vs. College Success*

	Native Freshmen				Non-Native Freshmen			
	Academic Success		Academic Failure		Academic Success		Academic Failure	
Friendliness	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
High	8	40	7	64	19	79	5	100
Moderate	9	45	2	18	4	17	0	0
Low	3	15	2	18	1	4	0	0
Total	20	100	11	100	24	100	5	100
		$x^2 = 2.30$ df = 2 n.s.				$x^2 = 1.26$ df = 2 n.s.		

*Success is defined as maintaining a 2.0 grade point average while completing 7.5 or more credits.

Table 11

Views on Anti-Native Prejudice on Campus vs. College Success*

	Native Freshmen				Non-Native Freshmen			
	Academic Success		Academic Failure		Academic Success		Academic Failure	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Perceived Direct Prejudice Against Natives	10	48	4	45	4	18	2	40
Perceived Natural Isolation of Different Cultural Groups	1	4	1	11	9	41	0	0
No Perceived Prejudice	10	48	4	44	9	41	3	60
Total	21	100	9	100	22	100	5	100
		$x^2 = .41$ df = 2 n.s.				$x^2 = 3.25$ df = 2 n.s.		

*Success is defined as maintaining a 2.0 grade point average while completing at least 7.5 credits.

Moore (200 students). A study of Bartlett's social culture, conducted by its resident advisor, found that the upperclassmen viewed the dormitory as a "hotel" of isolated individuals and wanted it that way. The freshmen, however, did not subscribe to the upperclassmen's independence ethic and wanted a closer-knit living situation.[14] The third upper campus residence hall, Skarland, had a smaller population (83 students) of only women and a resident advisor who encouraged dormitory integration through the intramural sports programs and other activities. Thus, despite the physical arrangement of rooms, Skarland was a fairly cohesive living situation.

The dormitories with the greatest degree of social cohesion were two of the lower campus dormitories, Wickersham (86 students) and McIntosh (68 students). Each was a single sex dormitory with an atmosphere similar to a sorority or fraternity. In McIntosh, for example, the dormitory residents called themselves the "Clan of Mac" and had an emblem which appeared on beer mugs, as well as other symbols of the fraternal spirit of the dorm. The only lower campus dormitory without a personal orientation was Lathrop, larger than the others (117 students) and fractured into sports-minded and alternative life-style peer groups.

Both Native and non-Native freshman success was significantly higher in the socially cohesive dormitories. It is also possible that this occurred because the more knowledgeable students selected the "better" dormitories. However, no relationship appeared between dormitory placement and academic preparation which would tend to support this interpretation.

No strong conclusions can be drawn from this study about the relationship between feeling ill at ease on campus and college success. Our evidence for this relationship is not nearly so straight-forward and conclusive as it is for the relationship between academic preparation and college success.

This is not to say, however, that discomfort in a western campus environment has not contributed to Native college failure in the past. It may well be that in the early 1960's when there were only a few isolated Native students on campus, that their social discomfort may have been intense and pervasive enough to affect

[14] J. Krasnowski, "How the Structure and Organization of Bartlett Hall Affects the Interaction Among the Residents." Paper written for *Sociology of Education*, October 30, 1973.

Table 12

Social Cohesiveness of Dormitory vs. College Success*

	Native Freshmen				Non-Native Freshmen			
	Academic Success		Academic Failure		Academic Success		Academic Failure	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Socially Cohesive Dormitory in 1974 (Wickersham, MacIntosh, Skarland, Stevens)	17	61	8	36	10	41	2	14
Socially Non-Cohesive Dormitory in 1974 (Bartlett, Moore, Lathrop, New Married Student Housing)	11	39	14	64	17	59	12	86
Total	28	100	22	100	27	100	14	100
		$x^2 = 3.98$ df = 1 $p < .05$				$x^2 = 4.33$ df = 1 $p < .05$		

*Success is defined as maintaining a 2.0 grade point average while completing at least 7.5 credits.

their performance. In 1974, however, 22 percent (50 out of 225) of the new freshmen on campus were Native, and Natives comprised slightly over 10 percent (315 out of 3,000) of the entire student body. In 1974 as well, the Student Orientation Services Program provided a lounge for students to gather, social activities, and such special events as a Native cultural festival. Thus, we found little difference between Native and non-Native freshmen in their participation in campus activities.

In addition, most Native freshmen at the University of Alaska in 1974 had previously attended large boarding schools or urban high schools. To these students, the University campus did not present any striking change in social atmosphere from what they had previously known. If they experienced cultural shock, it was during the transition from the village elementary school to a large bureaucratic high school. Those village students who were arriving at college were students who had already experienced this transition.

In sum, problems in social adjustment may have receded in importance due to (1) the increased size of the Native student population on campus, (2) the SOS Program, and (3) students' previous experiences in western bureaucratic settings.[15] Still, the situation is not ideal; it is only an improvement over previous years. This study still suggests that placing Native freshmen in more socially supportive living situations may still continue to have positive effects on college success. Indeed, on the Fairbanks campus, counselors do attempt to place freshmen in such dormitories. On other university campuses, however, lack of college dormitories or other cohesive college living arrangements may cause Natives serious difficulties in successfully pursuing college work.

CONCLUSION

1. The factor most strongly and consistently related to the college success of Native freshmen was the level of academic skills that they had acquired in high school.

2. How to increase the academic preparation of rural students, especially those interested in college, needs to become a serious policy concern. One possibility is to develop college-oriented coursework for rural high schools. The University of Alaska's Student Orientation Services program is interested in working with rural school districts to develop a curriculum for improving

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[15] Such problems may increase in importance again when students from the new small village high schools enter college.

communication skills. This curriculum is directed toward the communication difficulties rural students have in college. School districts could also explore student exchange programs which enable advanced rural students to take specialized coursework in larger high schools.

The academically talented Native student, who could do well in college with good high school preparation, is often forgotten. Increasing the number of college-educated Natives is going to require intensive educational efforts long before students arrive at college.

APPENDIX

Sample

The Native student sample included all students who were: one-fourth or more Eskimo, Athabascan, Tlingit, or Aleut and who were enrolled for the first time in a full-time degree program at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks in the fall of 1973. The group numbered 50 students, equally divided between men and women. About 52 percent (26) of the group were Eskimo, 30 percent (13) were Athabascan Indian, 10 percent (5) were Southeast Indian, and 8 percent (4) were Aleut. The largest proportion of the group (64 percent) were village students—Eskimo and Athabascan Indians who were half or more Native and had grown up in a Native-majority village or town.

The comparison group of non-Native students consisted of a 25 percent random sample of full-time degree freshmen enrolled for the first time at the University of Alaska during the fall of 1973. This group numbered forty-two students of whom 48 percent were women and 52 percent were men. The majority of non-Native students (48 percent) came from the more urban areas of Alaska (Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, and Ketchikan), while 21 percent came from small towns, and another 26 percent from outside the state. All these students were Caucasians.

Student Interviews and Other Information

Each student was sent a letter explaining the purpose of the study and requesting his participation. We followed this letter with a telephone call to further explain the objectives of the study. After obtaining informed consent, we asked the students to set a time for an interview.

The semi-structured interview was divided into three areas, each concerned with one of the three common explanations for difficulties students had at college. The first section requested

students' view of: the friendliness and personalism of the college environment and the degree of prejudice; peer groups; and social activities. The second section concerned the students' views about courses and the difficulty of academic work. The third section was concerned with students' goal orientation—why they had come to college, why they had chosen the University of Alaska at Fairbanks, and their career plans.

In coding interviews, an inter-rater reliability study was conducted with a criterion of 80 percent agreement. Occasionally, a response could not be coded or a question was omitted in error from an interview. Where this occurred, we omitted the interview, correspondingly reducing the total size of the group answering the question.

We sought other information on students' academic and social activities through interviews with three different college staff members—the SOS counselor, an SOS professor familiar with each student's daily work, and the dormitory advisor. Information on ACT scores, urban vs. rural background, grade point averages, and credits completed were obtained from university records.

Criterion of Success

We defined college success as maintaining a 2.0 passing grade point average or better while completing at least 7.5 credits, half the number needed to advance in class standing at the opening semester. This is a conservative measure of success. Completion of at least 12 credits with a passing grade point average is the informal criterion used by SOS staff members. However, use of the more conservative measure maintained consistency with previous research. [16] It also divided the Native freshmen group into roughly equal academic success and failure categories that were advantageous in examining relationships with other variables.

An alternative measure of college success would be whether the student left college prior to the spring semester. We did not select this method, because the college careers of many Native students include leaving college for a semester or so and returning. In our freshman group, about a third of the Native students (compared to 20 percent of the non-Natives) did not return for the spring semester. We did not attempt to calculate the exact proportion who returned for later semesters, but, informally, we know that a large number did come back.

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[16] Kouhout and Kleinfeld, *Alaska Natives in Higher Education.*

Limitations of Study

There are some important limitations to this study. First of all, the sample of students was small. We deliberately chose to concentrate research resources on a small group. This allowed us to follow more individual students more fully through interviews with several college staff as well as with the students themselves. However, the smallness of the sample does tend to limit student representation.

A second limitation to this study stems from the number of students with whom interviews could not be completed. No student directly declined to be interviewed, but others did so indirectly by not coming to the appointment after several requests. In addition, two students left college before they could be contacted for an interview. In all, interviews were completed with thirty-two of the fifty Native students (64 percent) and thirty of the forty-two non-Native students (71 percent).

Those Native students who were not interviewed did not differ from those interviewed in such characteristics as sex or degree of western background. However, a significantly higher proportion of the Native students we interviewed were successful (72 percent) as opposed to only 50 percent for the group not interviewed. This is not surprising since coming to an interview at the request of a college professor is similar to other kinds of behavior that would be more conducive to success in a college environment. However, this raises a problem in the interpretation of the data. It is possible that the students who were not interviewed had different attitudes from the ones who were. For example, it could be the case that a higher proportion of students who did not come to the interview were uncomfortable on campus and viewed the university as an unfriendly place. These kinds of difficulties occur frequently in studies relying on voluntary participation.

To mitigate the effects of a potential non-response bias, we have tried to use other sources of information on the students, such as reports of counselors on students' goals and social and academic difficulties. We also performed special statistical analyses, with an extreme assumption, that every student who did not come to the interview or whose answer could not be coded held such attitudes as, for example, the university seems unfriendly and prejudiced. When this extreme assumption is made, a weak statistical relationship occurs between success in college and (1) seeing the university as a friendly place and (2) having clear career goals. No relationship still occurs, however, between college success and seeing prejudice on campus. However, the assumption that every student who was not interviewed would hold one particular attitude is not a reasonable one. Still, it helps to show which results need qualification.